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FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9946

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001418

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC AND TASKFORCE-1

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/23/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM RU GG

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: SITREP 17: IT'S ABOUT TIME - BULK OF RUSSIAN TROOPS DEPART

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (U) Summary. Multiple sources confirm Russian troops have withdrawn most troops from undisputed Georgian territory, although some remain near key positions such as Poti, Senaki and Sachkere. The eastern part of the east-west highway is reportedly open, with light civilian traffic underway, but Russian checkpoints remain in the west near Poti, Senaki and Zugdidi. Eight more OSCE monitors have arrived or will shortly. Saakashvili will seek an extension of the state of war until September 8. Poti residents planned to conduct another protest against the ongoing Russian presence. End Summary.

THE RUSSIANS HAVE MOVED OUT MOST OF THEIR TROOPS . . .

¶2. (SBU) Sources in the Georgian government, the OSCE, UNOMIG and the press confirm that Russian troops have left Gori, Igoeti, Kashuri and had crossed the Enguri River in the west. There are no active Russian checkpoints on the east-west highway at least as far west as Kutaisi, with previous checkpoints at Igoeti, Kaspi and Khashuri dismantled. The road from Batumi to Kutaisi is reportedly clear of checkpoints as well. A government official reported that Georgian authorities are blocking some stretches of road in order to check bridges and overpasses for mines left by departing Russian forces, but would complete this "housekeeping" soon. The OSCE noted that the Russians left the physical elements of checkpoints at Shavshebi and Kvenokotsa (on either side of Gori), which could presumably be reactivated on short notice. The press reported that Russian troops had left the Georgian base at Senaki, leaving almost everything at the base destroyed. According to Georgian officials, IDPs from the Gori area are already being invited back to their homes in the city or surrounding villages.

. . . BUT NOT ALL.

¶3. (SBU) Government and OSCE sources noted there are still active Russian checkpoints on roads heading north from the area of Gori toward South Ossetia, at Akhalgori in southeastern South Ossetia, and near Poti, Senaki and Zugdidi in the west. The press reported active Russian checkpoints at Chkorotsku in Guria, at Tsalenjikha and Khobi in Samogrelo, and at Perevi outside Sachkere. The press also reported that, in addition to checkpoints, Russian military equipment remained in Poti. UNOMIG reported that Russian troops had taken up positions along the restricted weapons zone, which is not consistent with the withdrawal agreement.

EIGHT MORE OSCE MONITORS EN ROUTE

¶4. (SBU) The OSCE reported that two new Finnish and two new French monitors had arrived, two new American monitors were

expected in two or three days, and two new German monitors were expected by August 28. After a few days of orientation, the eight additional monitors would begin to enter the rotation next week.

EXTENSION OF STATE OF WAR

15. (SBU) The press reported that the National Security Council met Friday evening August 22 and recommended that President Saakashvili seek from Parliament an extension of the state of war until September 8, which he will reportedly do August 23.

FOOD SUPPLIES APPEAR STABLE

17. (SBU) Minister of Agriculture Kvezereli said that supplies of major food commodities appeared stable. He expressed confidence that overland imports from Turkey and sea imports from the ports of Batumi and Poti would resume soon. As of August 22, Azerbaijani suppliers were providing 600 metric tons of wheat a day to markets in Tbilisi and other eastern towns. With current imports and reserves, over one month of wheat stocks were available east of Gori. He added that the west had ample reserves as well; importers received 2,000 metric tons of wheat last week, which would provide reserves for 25 days when combined with existing stocks. Most other commodities, such as oil, sugar, beans and pasta, were in ample supply for the time being. The minister noted the one potential problem commodity was rice, which, although not a primary staple, was in short supply. He expected, however,

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that resumed imports from Turkey would likely provide new rice supplies.

VISITORS

16. (U) Senator Lugar arrives in the evening on 8/23. The economic delegation led by U/S Jeffrey arrives 8/25 and the OVP advance team arrives 8/27. Presidential candidate John McCain's wife Cindy arrives in Tbilisi 8/26. A delegation led by Congressman Duncan Hunter will visit Tbilisi September 11.

ANOTHER PROTEST IN POTI

17. (U) The press reported another protest against the Russian presence was planned for today in Poti.

TEFFT